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Reply to the Epistle of
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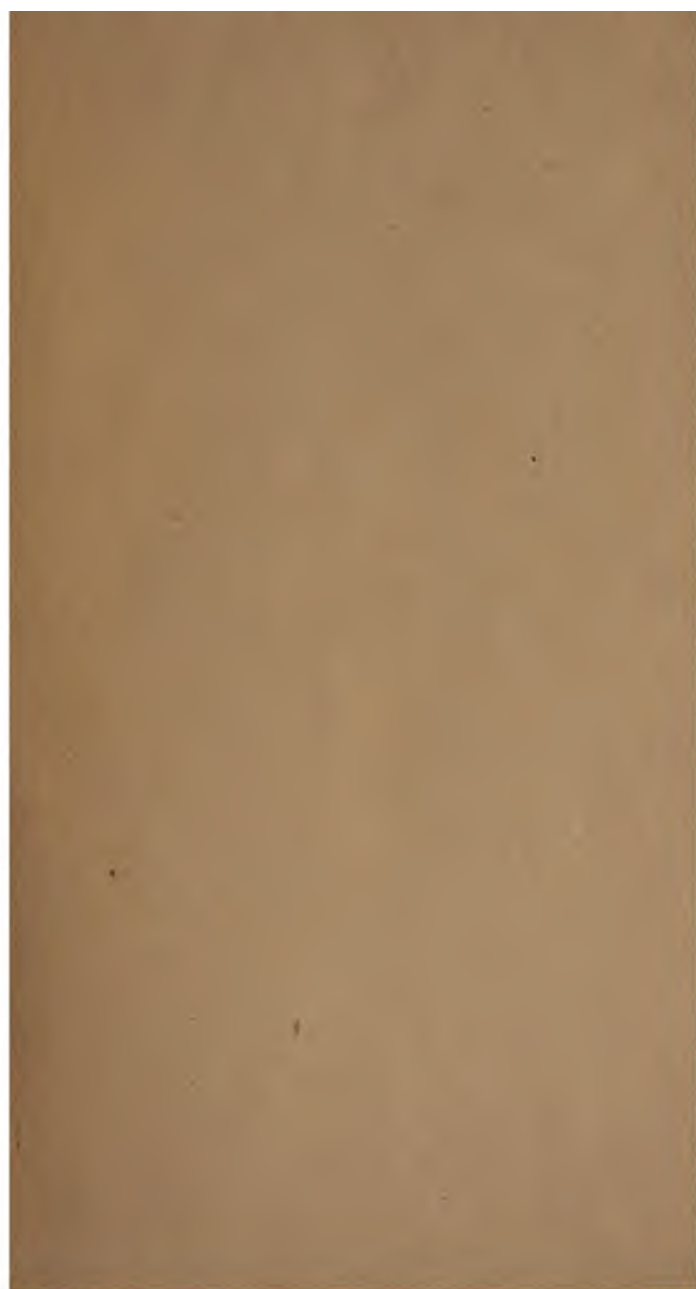


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REPLY
TO THE
EPISTLE OF THE YEARLY MEETING
OF
ORTHODOX FRIENDS

HELD AT
FOURTH AND ARCH STREETS, PHILADELPHIA, FOURTH
MONTH, 1897.

ADDRESSED TO ALL MEETINGS BEARING THE NAME OF
FRIENDS AND THE MEMBERS COMPOSING THEM.

BY
THOMAS H. SPEAKMAN.

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TO THE
YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS
HELD AT
FOURTH AND ARCH STREETS,
PHILADELPHIA.

DEAR FRIENDS:

Your epistle, signed by Ephraim Smith, clerk, addressed to all meetings bearing the name of Friends and the members composing them and directed to me from your book-store, No. 304 Arch Street, was duly received. I, being a member of the Yearly Meeting of Friends held at Fifteenth and Race Streets, Philadelphia (of whom I shall herein speak as Friends while speaking of you as Orthodox), must assume that it was sent to me under a concern for my welfare, and I assure you that you cannot feel a greater concern for my welfare than I do for yours. In replying to your communication I speak only for myself, having no delegated right to speak for the body of which I am a member; though for convenience I may occasionally use the collective pronoun.

In presuming, as superiors, to give counsel to so large a body of people as all those you address, you give new evidence of the spirit which animated your body when you, the Yearly Meeting known as Orthodox, severed your connection and correspond-

ence with all other bodies bearing the name of Friends seventy years ago, then assuming, as you have ever since maintained, that all others are wrong and you only right. You have since then so dwindled as to numbers that it is estimated you will at the present rate of decline become extinct as a body in forty years. But your decadence and approaching extinction—serious a matter as that is for you to contemplate—is less important than the cause of it,—viz., your exceeding narrowness and illiberality, your unwillingness or inability to see yourselves as others see you, as shown in your stubborn adherence to antiquated dogmas, forms, and modes of thought, and in such customs as disowning your members for marrying out of meeting, for having musical instruments in their houses, etc.

It was unbecoming in you to assume to be teachers and guides to all bearing the name of Friends, as you do by the issuance of this abnormal effusion, since it was you who, by your insistence in 1827 upon such speculative doctrines as you now put forth, caused the separation that has worked ruin in your remnant of the Society. You say, "As we look toward the tribes of our Israel which are scattered abroad, we have desired that a message of sympathy from us might reach all who are earnestly exercised for 'the faith once delivered to the saints,' and especially for those aspects of the truth which were apportioned unto us as a religious sect faithfully to manifest before the world." There is something wantonly ludicrous in your fatherly concern for the "scattered tribes of our Israel," since it was you who scattered them. Of the same char-

acter is your mock generosity in saying that your concern is not limited to those bodies which the Yearly Meeting has "officially recognized." Twice in your epistle you commend me to "the faith once delivered unto the saints." I do not know what sort of faith that is, but coming from you, as it does, I am apprehensive that it is a faith "without works," and I hesitate to accept it.

In view of the attitude that you have always entertained and publicly expressed toward the Yearly Meeting held at Fifteenth and Race Streets, Philadelphia, and its subordinate meetings and members, your sending to them this address exhibits a remarkable degree of effrontery. You have looked down upon them and held them up as infidels without the pale of Christian brotherhood, doomed to be eternally lost by reason of their heresies; denying that they are Friends and disowning them; making it a disownable offence for any of your members to attend one of their meetings; while sometimes asking and being allowed the privilege of holding meetings in their houses, you have sneeringly refused to reciprocate the privilege; you having obtained control of an institution called the shelter for Colored Orphans in Philadelphia, established by Friends prior to the separation, have made a rule that the children sheltered therein shall not be put out in families of "Hicksites," as you call them.

Some of these wrongs and insults, if acknowledged and atoned for in a Christian spirit, might have been overlooked as old and as incident to the frailties of human nature, but you seem still to be animated by the same spirit of bitter intolerance which caused

them. In this very epistle, issued as a forlorn hope to sustain yourselves in a false and wrong position, you have virtually asserted that we, Friends of Fifteenth and Race Streets, are not a Christian church because we do not accept your mystical theology, which intelligent Christians everywhere are fast coming to regard as superstitions of the past. And even by your manner of delivering your epistle we were offensively reminded of your persistent assertion that we are not Friends nor even any branch of the Society of Friends, and your determination not to recognize us as such is manifested by your stealthily sending your epistle to a person known to you to be the Clerk of our meeting, but not naming him as Clerk. You, or some of you, have occasionally met with Fifteenth and Race Streets members under the name of Friends for worthy objects, but it seems to me that a nice sense of propriety would forbid you associating with them as Friends when you do not admit that they are Friends; perhaps, also, a proper sense of self-respect should preclude our meeting with you under such circumstances.

But the most palpable wrong and dishonesty done by you to the great majority of Friends from whom you separated, of whom those at Fifteenth and Race Streets are a branch, is in regard to the property owned by the Society of Friends in 1827. As a prelude to what I have to say on this subject, I will quote from the "History of Friends in America," by two of your own members, Professor Allen C. Thomas, of Haverford College, and Richard H. Thomas, M.D., of Baltimore. After mentioning that a suit instituted by the Orthodox in New Jersey

resulted in a bill being passed by the Legislature of that State providing that an equitable division of property should be made in accordance with numbers, they say, "This only applied to New Jersey. In Pennsylvania, the Hicksites retained most of the country meeting-houses, while the Orthodox retained Westtown Boarding School, the Frankford Asylum for the Insane, and the bulk of the city property,—by far the lion's share of the whole." Besides Westtown School and the Frankford Asylum, they might have mentioned the Penn Charter School, the burial-ground and the School on the lot Sixteenth and Race Streets, all the Philadelphia meeting-houses except that on Green Street, the Shelter above mentioned, and the Walnut Street Almshouse.

As to the country properties, where the Orthodox were very few they were tendered their proportionate share, which they refused, claiming "All or none," under advice from Philadelphia. Friends are, therefore, clear of holding adversely what does not belong to them, and, should the time ever come for equity, would prefer that from their just portion of the "lion's share" in Philadelphia, the country Orthodox should still have their share they refused when offered. Your taking and still holding the "lion's share" of property that does not belong to you, was and is a gigantic blunder, and under Divine Providence you will suffer from it until the wrong is righted. If your own sense of justice or of self-respect does not induce a change of course, I commend you to the example of John Woolman in regard to existing wrongs, as related by John G. Whittier: "*The first inquiry which they awakened was addressed to his own conscience, 'How far am I in*

thought, word, or custom responsible for this? Have none of my fellow-creatures an equitable right to what is called mine?" "Have the gifts and possessions received by me from others been conveyed away free from all unrighteousness?"

I feel a sincere and earnest concern for the pupils in your schools, who know or will learn the truth about your conduct, and must ever suffer the mortification of feeling that they are reaping benefit from property that has not come honestly in your possession. Or if from your example or otherwise they may become insensible or indifferent to this sentiment of justice, the consequent demoralization must endanger the integrity of their whole lives. The large amount of unproductive property belonging to the whole Society, but held exclusively by you, could still be applied so as to effect a fairly equitable and satisfactory adjustment.

The following quotations from your epistle may be taken as embodying the theological dogmas to which you would have me subscribe as being "the original principles of our Society": "It is under a renewed sense of the love of God in Christ Jesus, His Son, that we feel drawn to address you, and to bring to your and our remembrances the extent and strength of that love which has been manifested to our race in the giving of the life of the blessed Redeemer as a sacrifice for our sins, and in the sending of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to give us the Light of Life." Again: "We rejoice that we can acknowledge our unity with Christian churches in general in the belief in the being, power, and attributes of our Heavenly Father, the offices of His

Son, Jesus Christ, as our Saviour and Redeemer, and those of the Holy Spirit of the Father and of the Son to guide, enlighten, quicken, and sanctify us, these three Divine names standing for manifestations of 'One God over all blessed forever.' "They and we believe also in the Divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures, in the sacrificial offering of our Lord Jesus Christ, who tasted death for every man, 'that the Divine Being in His unity with the Son, thus working out His love, might in the forgiveness of forsaken sin' be just and the justification of him which believeth in Jesus." You further speak of your points of union with "evangelical churches."

These points of union and dogmas before mentioned are reducible to two fundamental dogmas of the so-called evangelical churches which you adopted, as I allege, in lieu of the "original principles of our Society." The first of these is the doctrine that Adam was the father and progenitor of the whole human race on the earth; that at the instigation of Eve, his wife, he sinned by disobedience in eating an apple, the fruit of a forbidden tree; that Adam, having thus sinned, transmitted his sin by descent to all his posterity, generation after generation, to the end of time. A sufficient answer to this is its ridiculous absurdity.

The second fundamental dogma is that Jesus of Nazareth was put to a most cruel death as a sacrificial offering and atonement to the Heavenly Father for the sins of all mankind resulting from the disobedience of Adam in eating the apple. If the other doctrine is absurd, this is infinitely worse: it is not only ridiculously absurd, but it is profane and

blasphemous to the highest degree. It assumes that Jesus was brought into the world by the Heavenly Father expressly to be sacrificed and to be made the scapegoat and atonement to Himself for the sins of all mankind. There is no escaping the conclusion that this theory makes God the murderer of Jesus by a most cruel death. This doctrine is rendered still more odious by another theory involved in it that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, was not a man but a God, in that, though his mother was betrothed and married to a man, and had other children, this one, being her first born, was begotten by the Holy Ghost, and had God for his father. It is strange that any should be willing to accept literally this uncouth story as it is related in the first chapter of Matthew. This, and the story of the bodily resurrection of Jesus after he had been dead and in his grave three days with a death wound in his side, and his bodily ascension to heaven in a cloud, can only be accepted literally by a superstitious perversion of the human understanding. These are mere myths, like many more in the Bible and elsewhere, interesting as legends, showing the varying stages of human development, but to be ever regarded as subordinate to reason and to the light of Divine Truth in the individual mind. Jesus was neither a God, nor the one-third part of a God, but merely a man, and only as such could his example be of any benefit to us. The belief in virgin-born deities was a superstition of many of the ancient religions. The Egyptians claimed that the bull they worshipped was of virgin birth, the vivifying agent being a sunbeam from heaven. If you would give less attention to the prevalent superstitions regard-

ing the manner of Jesus' coming into the world, and as to what became of his mortal remains, and more to his blessed precepts and example as set forth in the New Testament, you would be better Christians than you are. The real Christian is not the bigoted worshipper of Jesus called the Christ, but is the sincere follower of Jesus who pointed to God as the only proper object of worship and to the light within as man's only safe guide.

"As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." You seem strangely obtuse in regard not only to this golden rule, but to the common amenities and decencies of life. Without reparation or apology for previous wrongs and insults, you offer a new insult by the sending of this paper. How would you receive it under like circumstances? It affords me, however, a welcome opportunity to present to you your conduct in all its baldness. I do this, however, in no spirit of enmity, but in the hope that you may be led to see your errors, for it is said that our best friends are those that tell us of our faults. Those of you whom I chance to know personally, will, I am well assured, not ascribe to me malevolence of purpose. I hope to live to find myself understood, and my efforts to serve you and the cause of truth and right appreciated.

Very sincerely your friend,

THOMAS H. SPEAKMAN.

NO. 26 NORTH SEVENTH STREET,
PHILADELPHIA, 1897.











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Reply to the epistle of the Yearly
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